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SUBJECT: Somalia - Central Region Drought Decimating Livelihoods

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1. A briefing on April 2, by the United Nation's Food Security Analysis Unit (FSAU) to donors highlighted the severity of the ongoing drought in Somalia's Central Regions (Mudug and Galgaduud extending into Hiran). Based on an analysis of historical indicators, FSAU states that this drought is comparable if not worse than the last major drought in this area (1991-92), following four consecutive poor harvests beginning in late 2007.

2. These regions are primarily rural and livelihoods are livestock-based. Current livestock conditions are poor due to massive deaths and high off-take. Sheep and goat herd sizes are down 30 percent from FSAU baseline rates and projected to be 50-60 percent below baseline by June 2009. Cattle are hit harder with rates having already hit 50 percent below baseline in December 2008. FSAU describes the impact as decimating to these pastoralists' livelihoods. FSAU labels over 400,000 persons in these regions as in "humanitarian emergency" or "acute food and livelihood crisis" requiring assistance.

3. The water situation, and by extension sanitation and hygiene, is desperate. In March, all the open water wells and communal dams were entirely dry. Shallow wells are muddy and silted and not fit for human consumption. Boreholes are the primary source of water which provides water to hundreds of thousands of people via water trucking. Reportedly the boreholes are also in poor condition through over-utilization and lack of money to fuel the pumps. The cost of a drum of water has increased by 150 percent in parts of Galgaduud compared to this period last year. UNICEF reported their staff has never seen a water crisis this bad in the Central Region.

4. Compounding the situation is the hyperinflation experienced over the last year in Somalia increasing food prices by up to 700 percent. Although prices have decreased in 2009, they remain at historically high levels far above long term averages making food access a problem; the price of livestock has declined precipitously due to the drought further impacting terms of trade.

5. FSAU analysis shows most poor Somalis depending on loans, gifts, and food aid for basic needs but report some shops closing as debts to them are not being repaid. Remittances are also declining

although FSAU did not have specific data to indicate by how much.

¶6. The nutrition situation in Central Region is worsening as well. Milk is a particularly important source of nutrition for young children. FSAU estimates there are 10,000 severely malnourished children in this area with only about 1,500 in treatment or less than 20 percent coverage. The last nutrition surveys in this area were in November 2008 (showing moderate malnutrition between 18 -20 percent exceeding the 15 percent emergency threshold) with the next surveys planned for April 2009.

¶7. The forecast for the coming (Gu) rainy season between April - June, indicates a higher than normal probability of below normal rainfall. Some light showers have started in parts of Somalia which could indicate an early beginning - as well as early end - which would be harmful for crop production and extend the subsequent dry season.

¶8. By most indicators, Somalia's Central Regions are experiencing a drought of historic proportions. These areas also experienced a large influx of IDPs from Mogadishu (primarily due to clan affiliations) and the recent return of a significant number of these to Mogadishu can be explained by the poor humanitarian conditions in Central Regions more so than improvements in security in Mogadishu. As these areas have traditionally been less food insecure than regions in the south, fewer implementing partners have a presence to mount a response hampering USAID's and other donor efforts. Ongoing insecurity also hampers the ability of agencies to operate. USAID's Office of Food for Peace (FFP) is the largest food aid donor into Somalia via the World Food Program (WFP) and they report a robust food pipeline through August 2009. USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) has prioritized Central Somalia for water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), nutrition, health, and

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livelihood sector funding. USAID will continue to monitor humanitarian conditions in the region and provide ongoing support to implementing partners.

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